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Elephant Sanctuary*



PAWS
PERFORMING ANIMAL
WELFARE SOCIETY

Founded in 1984
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March 10, 2022

Environment Committee
Connecticut General Assembly
State Capitol
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: Support for HB 5293 – An act prohibiting the use of wild or exotic animals in traveling animal acts

To Co-chairs Cohen and Gresko and Members of the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) – which directly cares for captive elephants, big cats, bears, and other wild animals – and our many supporters in Connecticut, we strongly urge you to support HB 5293 to prohibit the use of wild or exotic animals in traveling shows.

PAWS has been rescuing and providing sanctuary for abused, neglected, or retired captive wild animals for nearly 40 years. We operate three captive wildlife sanctuaries in California, including ARK 2000, a 2,300-acre natural habitat refuge where we care for big cats, elephants, and bears. Our president and co-founder, Ed Stewart, serves on the Director's Advisory Committee on the Humane Care and Treatment of Wild Animals for the California Department of Fish & Wildlife, and the Advisory Committee for the Detroit Zoological Society's Center for Zoo Animal Welfare.

The plight of wild animals used for entertainment is very personal to us at PAWS. Some of the animals we care for have come from circuses, and we have seen, firsthand, the effects on them:

- Fear of punishment was clearly evident in elephants when they first arrived at the sanctuary. One 10,000-pound male Asian elephant would wince if you moved your hand too quickly, expecting to be hit. It is well documented that animal handlers in circuses employ harmful methods to train and manage wild animals, including the use of whips, rods, elephant bullhooks, and electric shock devices.
- Lions were hyper-aggressive, as compared to those from other backgrounds. We attributed this behavior to the long-term stress of travel, intensive confinement, inhumane training, and performing.

It is left to the sanctuary to rehabilitate and provide lifelong care for these deserving animals. We work very hard to ensure they enjoy a more fulfilling life by providing spacious natural habitats, individualized diets, and comprehensive husbandry and veterinary care.

By their very nature, traveling shows make it impossible for a wild animal to live a healthy life. The problems are many: constant travel from city to city, intensive confinement in cramped cages and transport vehicles, abusive training, and sterile environments.

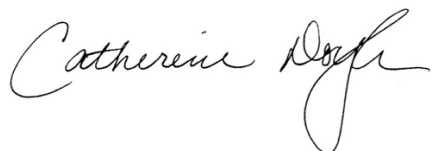
Unnatural conditions for animals in traveling shows often contribute to serious physical and psychological problems. For example, elephants stand on hard surfaces, immobilized in chains. Lack of movement and standing on unyielding surfaces are highly associated with foot and musculoskeletal diseases that can be fatal to elephants. Strenuous tricks such as sitting or standing upright also degenerate the joints, causing years of pain and premature death. Big cats can suffer foot problems and may become obese, compromising their health and welfare. Abnormal repetitive behaviors are ubiquitous in traveling shows (e.g., pacing in big cats and bears; swaying, rocking, and head bobbing in elephants) and widely recognized as a sign of stress and poor welfare.

Wild animals used in traveling shows are not domesticated, including those born in captivity. They retain their natural instincts, which they may act on when threatened or frightened, or sometimes with no warning at all. Performing wild animals endure an inordinate amount of stress due to travel, abusive training, loud sounds, the presence of spectators, and close confinement. All this makes them unpredictable and dangerous – and a serious threat to public safety. Nevertheless, they are displayed in close proximity to the public in unsafe conditions. There are numerous accounts of animal escapes from circuses, including elephants and big cats, which put people and first responders at great risk.

Animal acts do not educate children or help conserve endangered species. Rather, they distort the public's perception of wild animals and their imperiled status in the wild. Research suggests that seeing wild animals in an entertainment context *harms* legitimate conservation efforts. This is concerning because traveling shows commonly feature endangered species such as Asian elephants and tigers.

Public attitudes toward the use of wild animals in traveling shows have changed, making this the right time for HB 5293. I strongly urge you to support this important bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Catherine Doyle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Catherine" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Doyle".

Catherine Doyle, M.S.
Director of Science, Research and Advocacy
Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS)

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